



PILOT LOG 2002

Jitneys On The River

The Local Steamboats of the Hudson River

As important to the Hudson River's transportation infrastructure as the express steamers that plied from major towns and cities to New York were the local steamboats—called "yachts"—which connected many otherwise unreachable riverside villages with these major localities. They were the buses—the "jitneys"—of a by-gone era. These local routes were the lifeblood of the villages, which were isolated from the centers of commerce like Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Rondout, Hudson and Albany, and too small to merit a landing by the larger steamers.

The yachts provided a means by which residents of the outlying points might reach a nearby large town, for business or pleasure, in the days before there were convenient railroad connections or improved roads. The little steamers also carried all kinds of local freight, in particular the farm produce necessary to feed those who lived in town, as well as the local newspapers which were so important in those days before radio and television.

The yachts were small propeller steamboats carrying a modest number of passengers. They were varied in their design—some were single-decked while larger vessels might have an upper deck—ideal for a moonlight sail on a summer evening. Typically they were from 50 to 100 feet in length, and were propelled by small steam engines. The operating crew might consist of a captain, engineer and a deckhand or two, depending upon size. Some of the larger yachts also might carry a fireman.

The "J. McCausland", a typical inter-town "jitney"



Rondout was the base of operations for the yachts that operated up the river to Glasco and Malden, down river to Poughkeepsie, and along the Rondout Creek on which one could venture as far as Eddyville with way landings at South Rondout and Wilbur. At Rondout, vessels like *Augustus J. Phillips*, *Charles A. Schultz*, *Charles T. Coutant*, *Edwin B. Gardner*, *Eltinge Anderson*, *Ettie Wright*, *Glenerie* (later *Elihu Bunker*), *Henry A. Haber*, *Hudson Taylor*, *John McCausland*, *Lewis D. Black*, *Lotta*, *Morris Block* (later *Kingston*), *Thomas Miller, Jr.* and others maintained the local services over the years, providing for the transportation needs of many residents and businesses along the creek and in the small riverside villages. In addition, smaller vessels named *Annex* and *Minnie* ran from Eddyville up the D. & H. canal as far as Creek Locks.

The upriver towns of Coeymans, Coxsackie, New Baltimore and other points were way landings on a web of routes between Hudson and Albany and on to Troy. The steamers of the Albany and Troy line were particularly busy. Similar routes were maintained out of Newburgh and other down river locations. From Newburgh, one could travel to Peekskill on the little *Carrie A. Ward* or to Wappingers Falls aboard *Messenger*. A trip from Wappingers Falls to Newburgh was a challenge if Captain Terwilliger's steamer was not running. The traveler had to make his way to New Hamburg by stage or carriage, then by train to Fishkill Landing, then on to Newburgh by ferry—all of course depending upon the vagaries of travel in those far-off days.

The yachts maintained a fixed schedule during the months when the river was free of ice. During their off hours they might be chartered for an excursion by a local organization like a volunteer firemen's association. A popular Sunday after-

The "Ursula", one of the larger inter-city "jitneys"



noon destination of the Rondout Creek boats was Henry A. Haber's recreational park near Eddyville. This gentleman's entrepreneurial nature was evident to the pleasure seekers—Haber yachts carried them to the Haber park and back.

It was not always a world of easy-going transportation, but accidents were rare. Fog, high winds, floating ice or some other hazard occasionally made a trip exciting. On the morning of April 8, 1901, the Rondout-to-Glasco yacht *John McCausland* collided with her running mate *Glenerie* at the mouth of the Rondout Creek. *McCausland*, outward bound for Glasco, was not badly damaged, but *Glenerie*, headed home to Rondout, was not so fortunate. She began to fill with water, and Cornell tugs, quick on the scene, succeeded in moving the partly sunken yacht to a nearby sand bar. Even today, the eddies that occur at the mouth of the creek at certain stages of the tide can be dangerous for small craft, and it was claimed that the stern of *Glenerie*—perhaps encountering her own Charybdis—swung into the path of the other vessel as they approached one another. It was clearly a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The following day, *Glenerie* was raised and taken to Hildebrant's yard for repairs. The little yacht was back in service on the 20th—twelve days after the accident. Nobody aboard either steamer was injured.

With the construction of paved roads and the introduction of the bus and the motor car for transportation from the 1910s, the era of "jitneys on the river" came to a close. One by one, the yachts were dismantled or otherwise left the routes over which they had been so much a part of life along the Hudson. No longer would the daily routine at the riverside villages be punctuated by the whistles of the yachts as they made their frequent landings. Progress caused life to become easier in a way, but some of the joy of travel on the river disappeared with the yachts.

